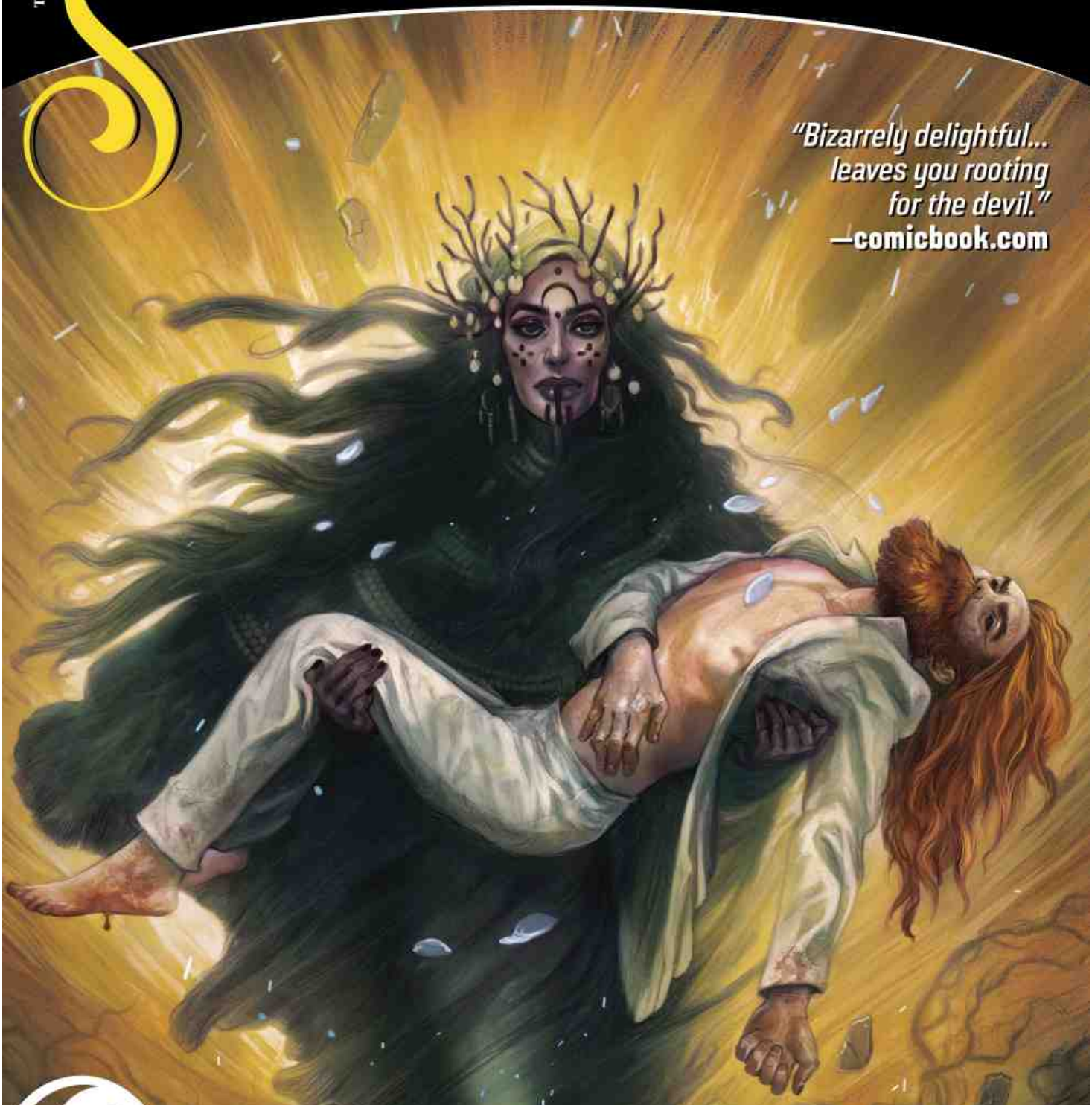
THE SANDMAN ✦ UNIVERSE



"Bizarrely delightful... leaves you rooting for the devil."
—comicbook.com

6

Lucifer

Dan *Watters*
Sebastian *Fiumara*
Max *Fiumara*
Dave *McCaig*

DC VERTIGO

MATURE READERS

I ALREADY STITCHED YOU UP. I WILL NOT CARRY YOU.
I WOULD NOT LET YOU.
YOU HAVE NOT BEEN MUCH YOURSELF. IT MAKES YOU WEAK.
YOU HAVE NOT BEEN YOURS.
BY YOUR DOING.
MY STRENGTH SHALL RETURN AS MY MIND RETURNED WITH YOURS. DO NOT WORRY YOURSELF.
IT'S ONLY TAKING A LITTLE LONGER.
YOUR SELF-WORTH RETURNS, AT LEAST.
GET UP. ONCE WE'RE BACK, YOU'RE EXPLAINING WHAT YOU'VE DONE TO MY SON.
YOU BROUGHT ALL OF THESE SOULS INTO MY MIND. MUDDLING IT.
AND YET...
WHERE HAVE THEY GONE?

HIS NAME IS ROBERT JOHNSON.
HE MET THE DEVIL AT THE CROSSROADS, LAUNCHING HIS MUSIC CAREER AND INSPIRING A THOUSAND INSIPID ROCK 'N' ROLL MYTHS IN A SINGLE EVENING.
THE DEAL HE MADE WITH LUCIFER DID NOT BLESS HIM WITH THE VOICE OF GRAVEL THAT PUT FEAR AND THRILL INTO THE FOLKS WHO HEARD HIS SONGS...
IT MERELY MEANT IT WAS HEARD A LITTLE MORE WIDELY.
BUT WHAT GOOD'S BEING HEARD, WHEN YOU'RE DEAD BY THE AGE OF 27?
THE DEVIL IS A DECEIVER WHO DANCES THROUGH FLAME WHILE THE MARROW OF THOSE AROUND HIM CRACKLES.
BUT IN THIS PLACE, AT LAST, THE DEVIL CAN BURN.

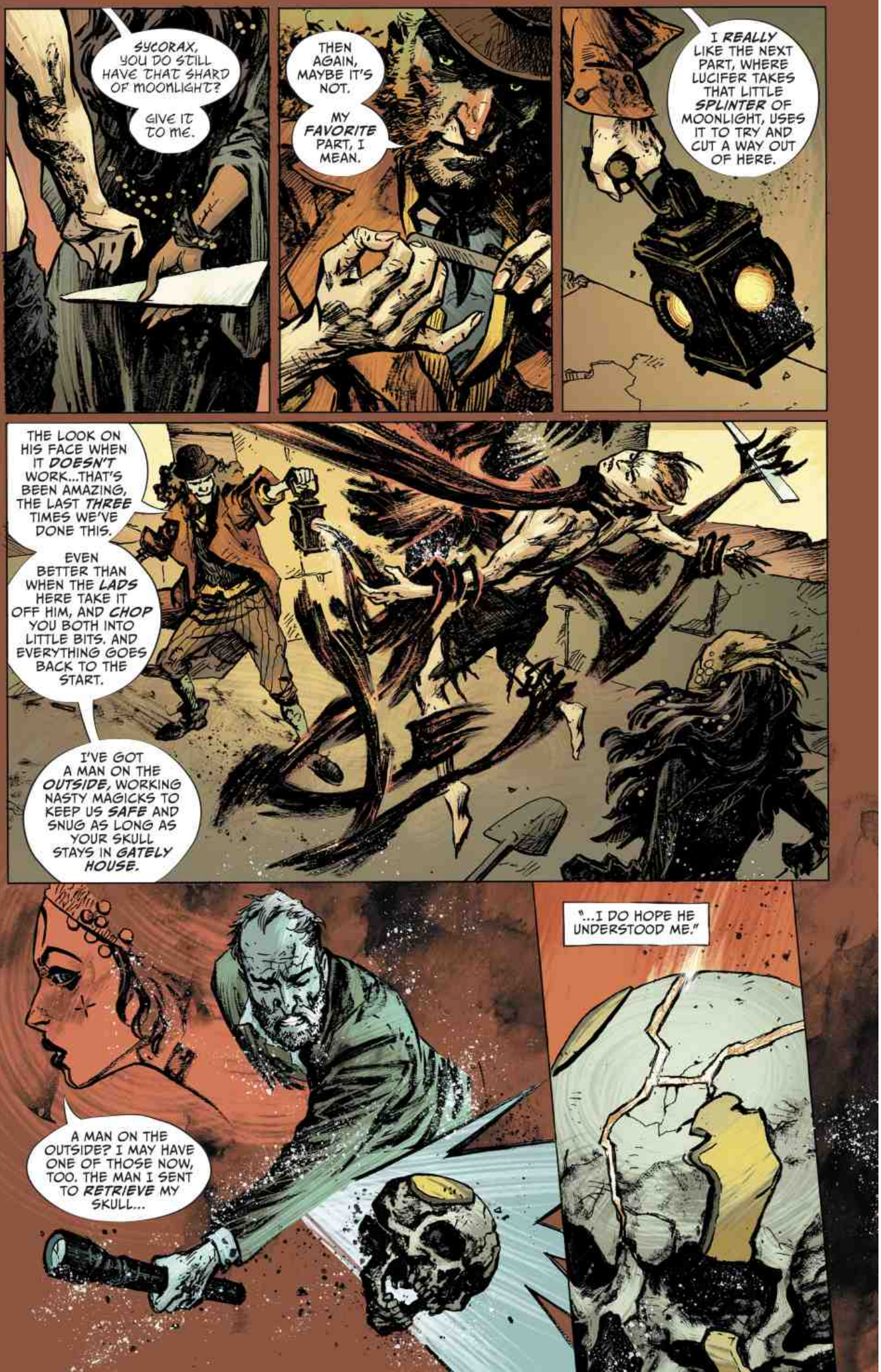
GATELY HOUSE
IHR'LL BUHN HIEH THKINH FRUH HIEH BUHNS.
This was the man John Decker, for certain. Not Ewell.
WHRY?
WHUR DUESH HE WURNT WIRH THE SHKULL?
He has become tangled in this by proximity only. He doesn't understand.
He will probably destroy the skull--it's what humans do with what they fear--and with it, my mother. Lucifer, too.
Have your demons dress themselves in flesh.
We must find him, and find him quickly.
WE ERRH FORSHURNUH HE HUH LEFSHT USH UH TSHRAIL.

THE THROBBING IN HIS MIND HAS ROBBED HIM OF ALMOST ALL, NOW.
HE HAS NO CONCEPT OF BEING A MAN ANYMORE. THE WORD AND CONCEPT ARE LOST TO HIM.
THERE IS ONLY THE SELF AND THIS REPUGNANT OBJECT HE GRIPS TO HIS CHEST.
ALL THE LOVE AND HATE AND GRIEF AND MISERY OF LIFE HAVE BOILED DOWN TO THIS.
HIS FEET LEAD HIM AUTOMATICALLY.
THEY BETRAY HIM, PERHAPS. HIS BODY HAS BEEN DOING THAT PLENTY, OF LATE.
HE CAN'T REMEMBER WHY, EXACTLY. BUT HE KNOWS THAT IT IS RIGHT.
NO MATTER. HE HAS ONLY ONE THING LEFT TO DO.
QUICKLY, NOW. BEFORE HIS STRENGTH LEAVES HIM. BEFORE HIS VISION GOES DARK.
HE NEEDS SOMETHING HEAVY.
THIS WILL DO.

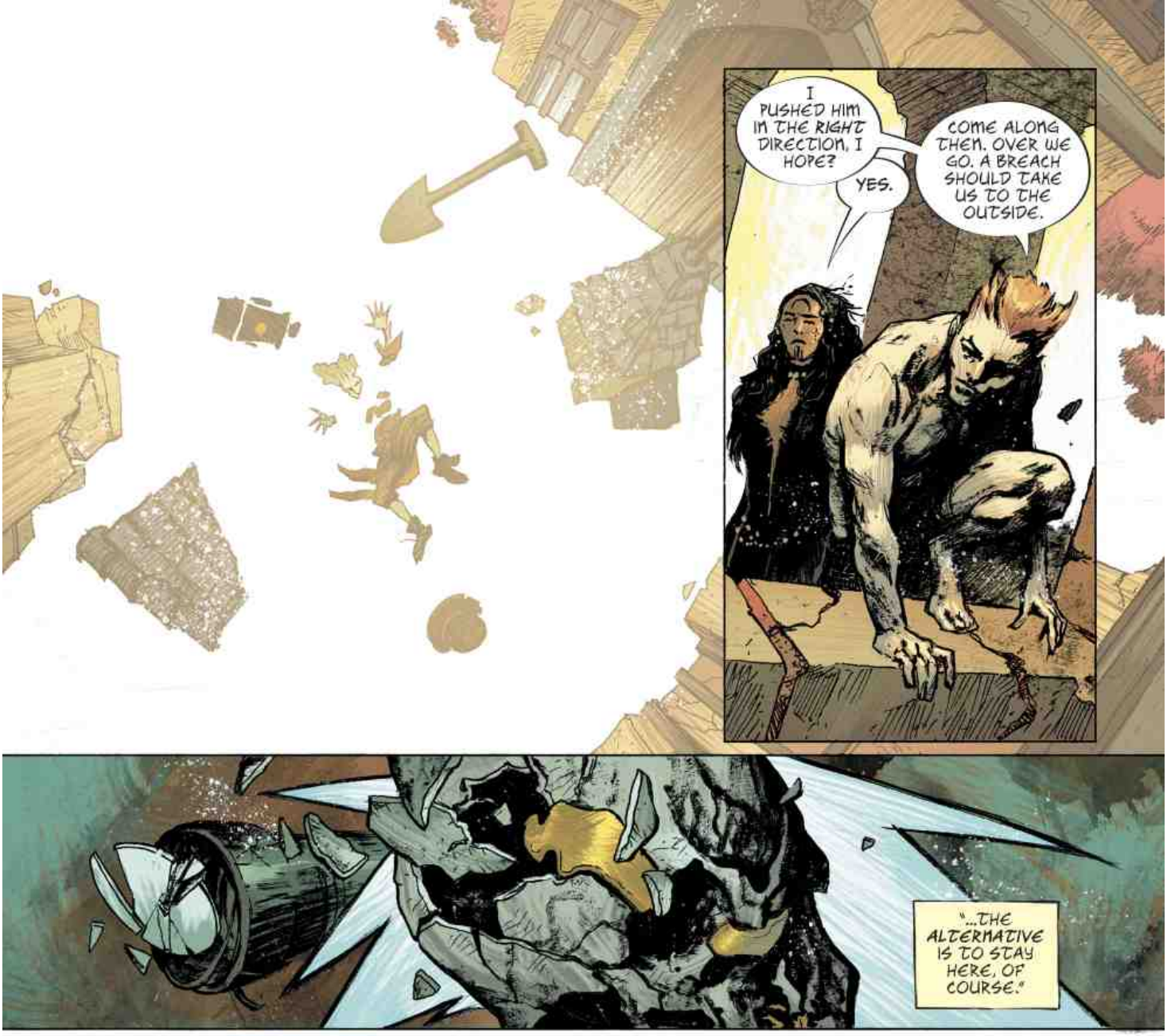
I'LL HAVE MY BIRDS TEAR YOU DOWN THE MARROW.
ATTEND ME, MY RAVENS, WITH TALON AND BEAK!
HE PROMISED MY SON BACK, AND DELIVERED A CORPSE. I WASN'T SPECIFIC ENOUGH.
MY BIRDS.
THEN HE BROUGHT ME HERE, AND I FORGOT MY SON ALTOGETHER.
WHERE ARE MY BIRDS?!
THE CITY WAS UNDER SEIGE, AND GOD WOULDN'T ANSWER MY PRAYERS, SO YOU DID.
DON'T TOUCH ME.
BUT THEN AFTER THE SOLDIERS LEFT, THERE WAS NO FOOD.
BETTER THAT I'D DIED WHEN GOD INTENDED THAN WHAT CAME NEXT.
THE CHILDREN WOULDN'T HAVE LIVED ANYWAY... NO POINT IN US STARVING, TOO.
HUUURT
LUCIFER

YOU BLAME ME FOR YOUR SINS AND TRAGEDIES? ALL I GRANTED ANY OF YOU WAS AGENCY, WHEN I SAW A USE.
I NEVER GAVE A SINGLE TOSS FOR YOUR SOULS.
IT WAS EASIER, ONCE THE FIRST ACT OF EVIL WAS COMMITTED, TO CLAIM TO BE OF MY PARTY THOUGH, WASN'T IT?
I MADE IT CLEAR TO EACH OF YOU. I HAVE NO PARTY.
AND I, LUCIFER?
I, THE POOR POET WILLIAM BLAKE, WHO OFFERED YOU NOTHING BUT KINDNESS, WHEN YOU OFFERED ME NOTHING BUT CRUELTY, AGAIN AND AGAIN?
WILL YOU STRIKE ME DOWN, TOO, AND PROVE WHAT YOU ALWAYS WERE?

I NEVER CLAIMED TO BE OTHER THAN THAT WHICH I AM.
THOUGH BRIEFLY I MAY HAVE FORGOT.
JACK WAITS FOR YOU IN THE BELL TOWER.
I'D ADVISE NEVER TURNING TO ANGELS FOR SUCH A THING.
MAY ALL THE ARCHANGELS HAVE MERCY ON YOU.
THEY'RE ALL VERY ANGRY AT YOU.
YES.
AYE THEY SURE ARE, AREN'T THEY?
THAT'S ALWAYS MY FAVORITE BIT OF THIS WHOLE THING.


SYCORAX, YOU DO STILL HAVE THAT SHARD OF MOONLIGHT?
GIVE IT TO ME.
THEN AGAIN, MAYBE IT'S NOT.
MY FAVORITE PART, I MEAN.
I REALLY LIKE THE NEXT PART, WHERE LUCIFER TAKES THAT LITTLE SPLINTER OF MOONLIGHT, USES IT TO TRY AND CUT A WAY OUT OF HERE.
THE LOOK ON HIS FACE WHEN IT DOESN'T WORK...THAT'S BEEN AMAZING, THE LAST THREE TIMES WE'VE DONE THIS.
EVEN BETTER THAN WHEN THE LADS HERE TAKE IT OFF HIM, AND CHOP YOU BOTH INTO LITTLE BITS. AND EVERYTHING GOES BACK TO THE START.
I'VE GOT A MAN ON THE OUTSIDE, WORKING NASTY MAGICKS TO KEEP US SAFE AND SNUG AS LONG AS YOUR SKULL STAYS IN GATELY HOUSE.
A MAN ON THE OUTSIDE? I MAY HAVE ONE OF THOSE NOW, TOO. THE MAN I SENT TO RETRIEVE MY SKULL...
"...I DO HOPE HE UNDERSTOOD ME."

KRA-KAAK
WH-WHAT? WHAT'S THIS?
I'D GUESS SOMEONE'S ATTEMPTING TO *DESTROY* ME. OR POSSIBLY LUCIFER.
EITHER WAY, THIS PLACE IS DONE WITH.
N-NO. NOT IF *I*--


I PUSHED HIM IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION, I HOPE?
YES.
COME ALONG THEN. OVER WE GO. A BREACH SHOULD TAKE US TO THE OUTSIDE.
"...THE ALTERNATIVE IS TO STAY HERE, OF COURSE."

IN WHICH CASE WE'LL SHORTLY CEASE TO EXIST, I'D HAZARD.

YOUR EYES ARE GROWING BACK.
COME ALONG.
PERHAPS IF I STAY, I CAN ESCAPE YOU. FIND THE PEACE I SOUGHT, THAT YOU'VE NOT ALLOWED ME EVEN IN DEATH.
EXCEPT...
CALIBAN.
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO HIM?
NOTHING.
NOTHING YOU AND I HAD NOT ALREADY MANAGED.
YOU LIE.
YOU KNOW I NEVER DO.
AND SO I TOLD HIM THE TRUTH. OF OUR STORY.
TWISTED NO DOUBT, IN YOUR WAY.
I TOLD HIM.

"I TOLD HIM YOU WERE BORN NEAR ALGIERS. MORE POWERFUL THAN ANY SON OR DAUGHTER OF ADAM I'D SEEN BEFORE."
"THEY CALLED ME WITCH WHEN THEY THOUGHT I COULDN'T HEAR.
"BUT WHEN I LEFT AND TRAVELED THE WORLD, AND RETURNED YEARS LATER LADEN WITH JEWELS AND STORIES, THEY WEPT TO SEE ME."

"FOR THE VILLAGE NEEDED YOU. AS HEALER FOR THEIR ILLS, AND TO PROTECT THEM FROM THE INVADING SPANISH."
"AND I NEEDED THEM...NOT AT ALL."
"FOR THE WORLD BENT TO YOUR WILL. THE SUN AND STARS HELD THEIR BREATH AS YOU PASSED..."

"BUT I HAD EYES ONLY FOR THE MOON."
"AND HE FOR YOU."

"AND ONE NIGHT AS I WALKED UPON THE BEACH OF SILK-SOFT SAND..."

"HE COULD BE WITHOUT YOU NO LONGER."

"AND HE DREW ME TO HIM."

"AS I TURNED IN THE SKY BETWEEN TWO LUMINOUS ORBS, I COULD TELL NO LONGER WHAT WAS UP OR DOWN.
"I COULD NOT WAIT TO *WALK* UPON HIS SILVER SANDS."

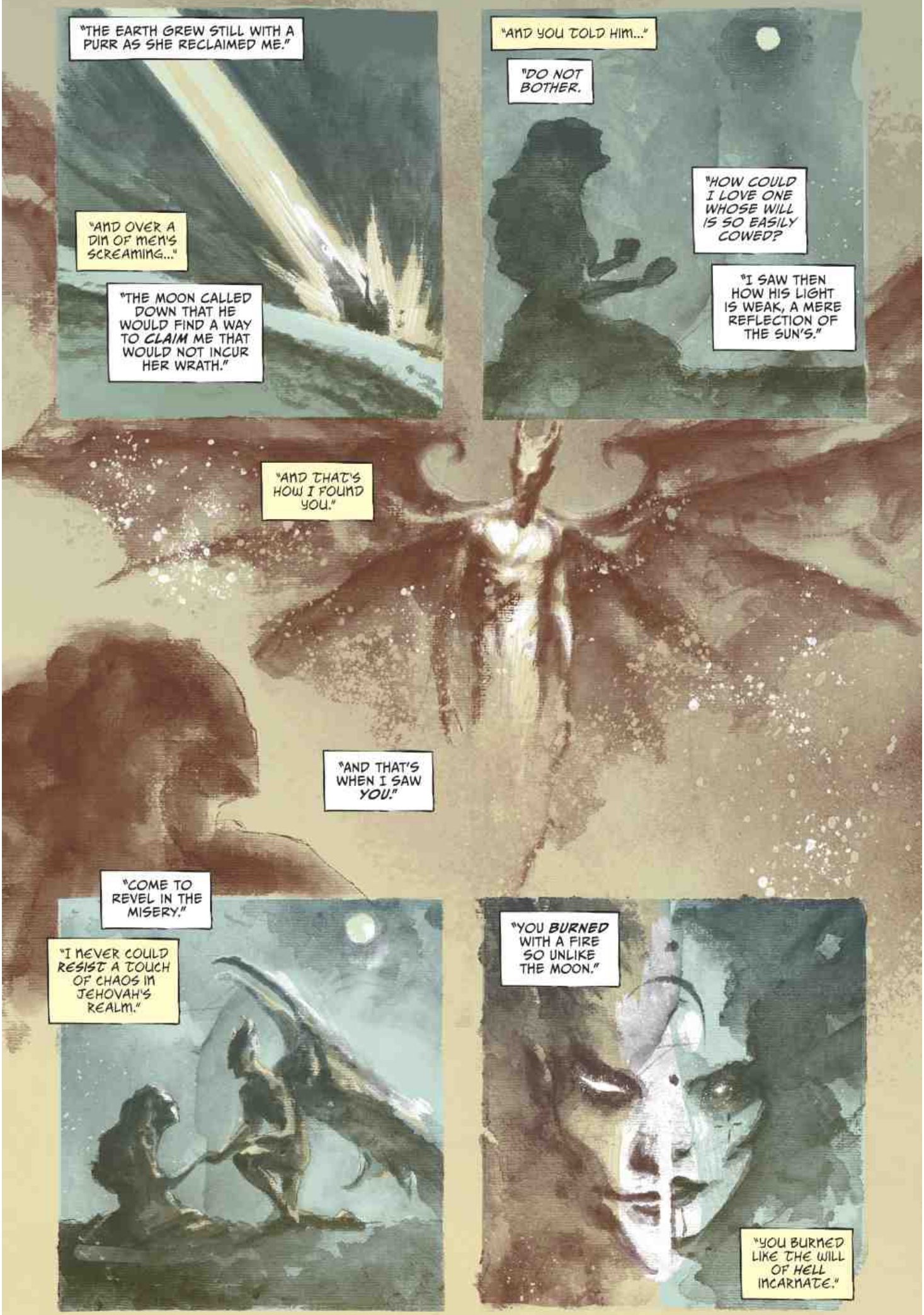
"BUT THE EARTH IS A JEALOUS MOTHER, AND DOES NOT GIVE UP HER PRIZES SO EASILY.
"SHE QUAKED WITH RAGE TO LOSE YOU."

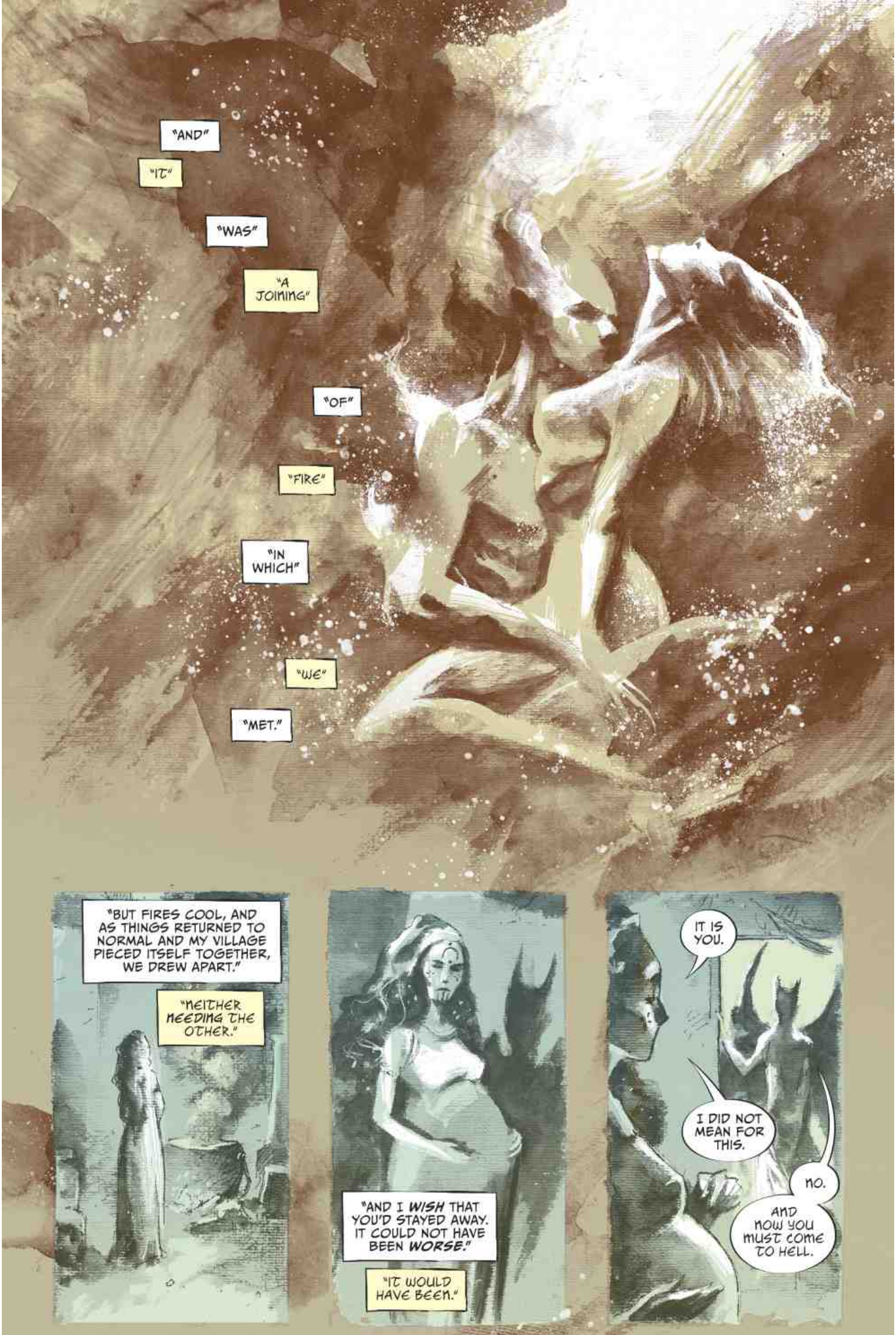
"THE FISHERMEN OF MY TOWN FOUND THE CRYSTAL SURFACE OF CALM WATERS TURN TO TUMULT."
"AND THEY *DROWNED*."

"THOSE DAYWORKERS ALREADY ABED WOKE TO FIND THE CLIFF TOPS TUMBLING DOWN TO MEET THEM."
"AND THEY WERE *CRUSHED*."

"AND I LOOKED BACK AND *DESPAIRED*... BUT I WAS ALMOST THERE."
"BUT THE MOON. HE *TREMBLED* AT THE EARTH'S RAGE."

"AND HE DROPPED ME."
"HE WAS WEAK."

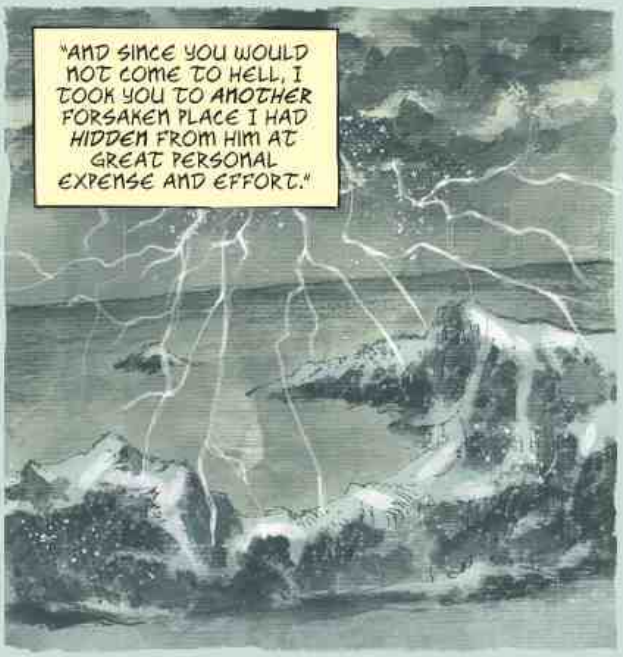

"THE EARTH GREW STILL WITH A PURR AS SHE RECLAIMED ME."
"AND OVER A DIN OF MEN'S SCREAMING..."
"THE MOON CALLED DOWN THAT HE WOULD FIND A WAY TO CLAIM ME THAT WOULD NOT INCUR HER WRATH."
"AND YOU TOLD HIM..."
"DO NOT BOTHER.
"HOW COULD I LOVE ONE WHOSE WILL IS SO EASILY COWED?
"I SAW THEN HOW HIS LIGHT IS WEAK, A MERE REFLECTION OF THE SUN'S."
"AND THAT'S HOW I FOUND YOU."
"AND THAT'S WHEN I SAW YOU."
"COME TO REVEL IN THE MISERY."
"I NEVER COULD RESIST A TOUCH OF CHAOS IN JEHOVAH'S REALM."
"YOU BURNED WITH A FIRE SO UNLIKE THE MOON."
"YOU BURNED LIKE THE WILL OF HELL INCARNATE."

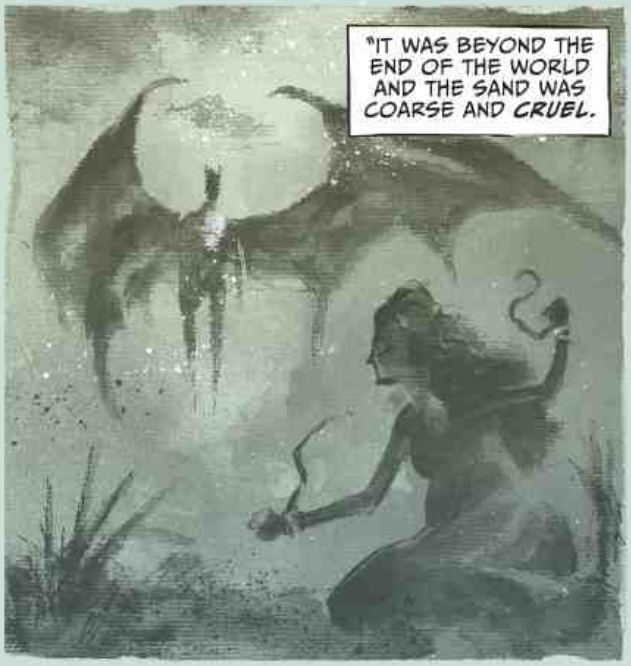

"AND"
"IT"
"WAS"
"A JOINING"
"OF"
"FIRE"
"IN WHICH"
"WE"
"MET."
"BUT FIRES COOL, AND AS THINGS RETURNED TO NORMAL AND MY VILLAGE PIECED ITSELF TOGETHER, WE DREW APART."
"NEITHER NEEDING THE OTHER."
"AND I WISH THAT YOU'D STAYED AWAY. IT COULD NOT HAVE BEEN WORSE."
"IT WOULD HAVE BEEN."
IT IS YOU.
I DID NOT MEAN FOR THIS.
NO.
AND NOW YOU MUST COME TO HELL.

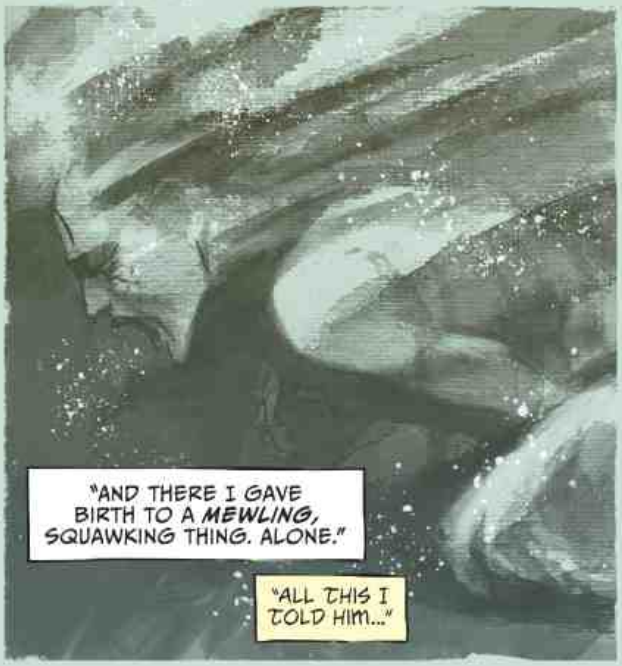
I DO NOT BELIEVE MY FATHER WILL ALLOW ME TO HAVE AN HEIR BORN.
SHOULD HE KNOW OF IT HE WILL HAVE IT DESTROYED, BUT I CAN HIDE YOU BOTH BEYOND HIS OMNISCIENT EYE.

YOU TOO ARE A DISAPPOINTMENT. YOU TREMBLE AT THE THOUGHT OF YOUR FATHER?
YOU BEND TO HIS WILL BEFORE YOUR OWN.
"IT IS A SUBJECT YOU ARE ETERNALLY TETCHY ABOUT.

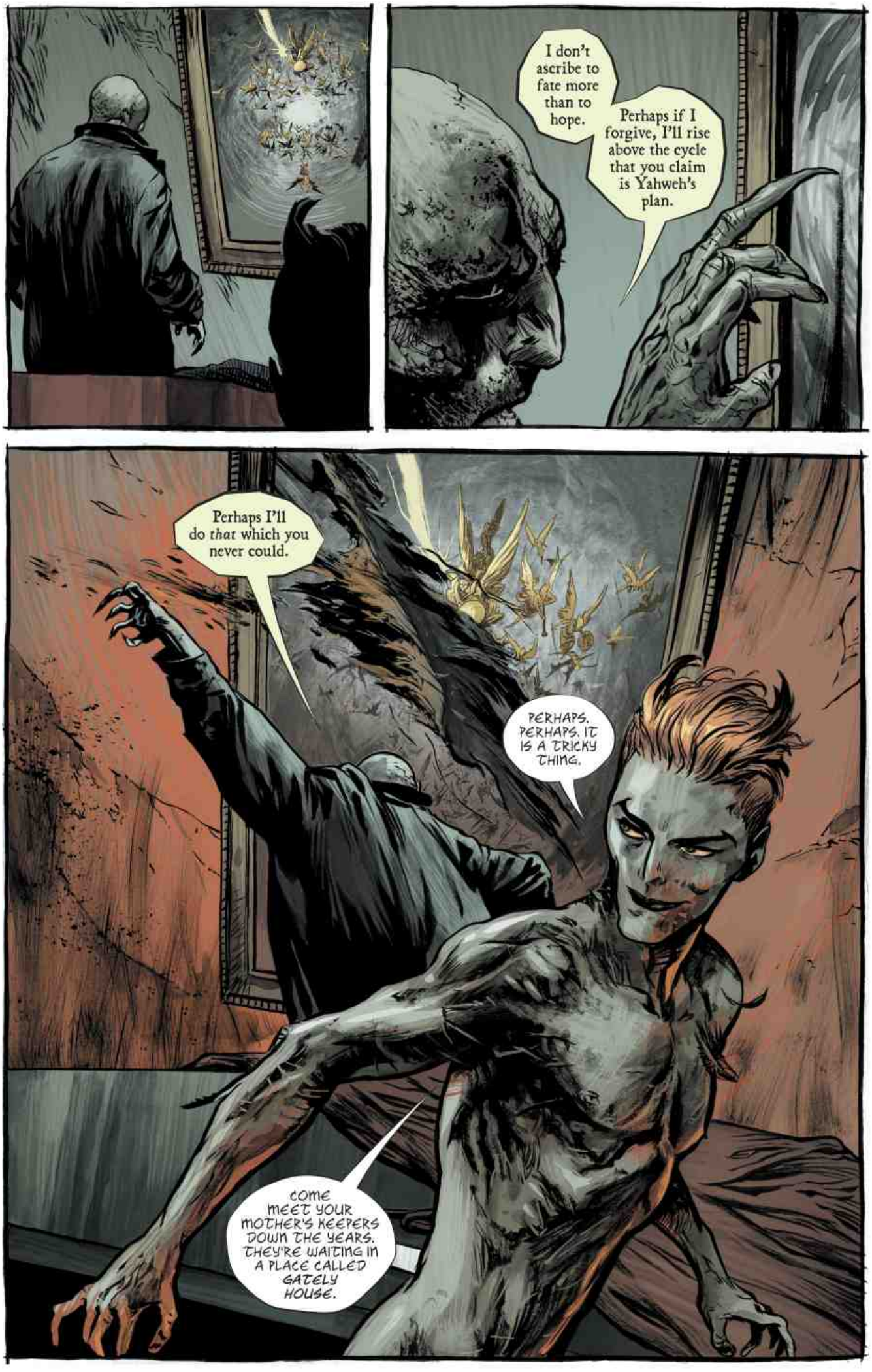
"YOU WOULD NOT HEAR REASON...
"SO I DID SHEW YOU THE LIMITLESSNESS OF THE WILL YOU DISPARAGED.


"AND SINCE YOU WOULD NOT COME TO HELL, I TOOK YOU TO ANOTHER FORSAKEN PLACE I HAD HIDDEN FROM HIM AT GREAT PERSONAL EXPENSE AND EFFORT."


"IT WAS BEYOND THE END OF THE WORLD AND THE SAND WAS COARSE AND CRUEL.

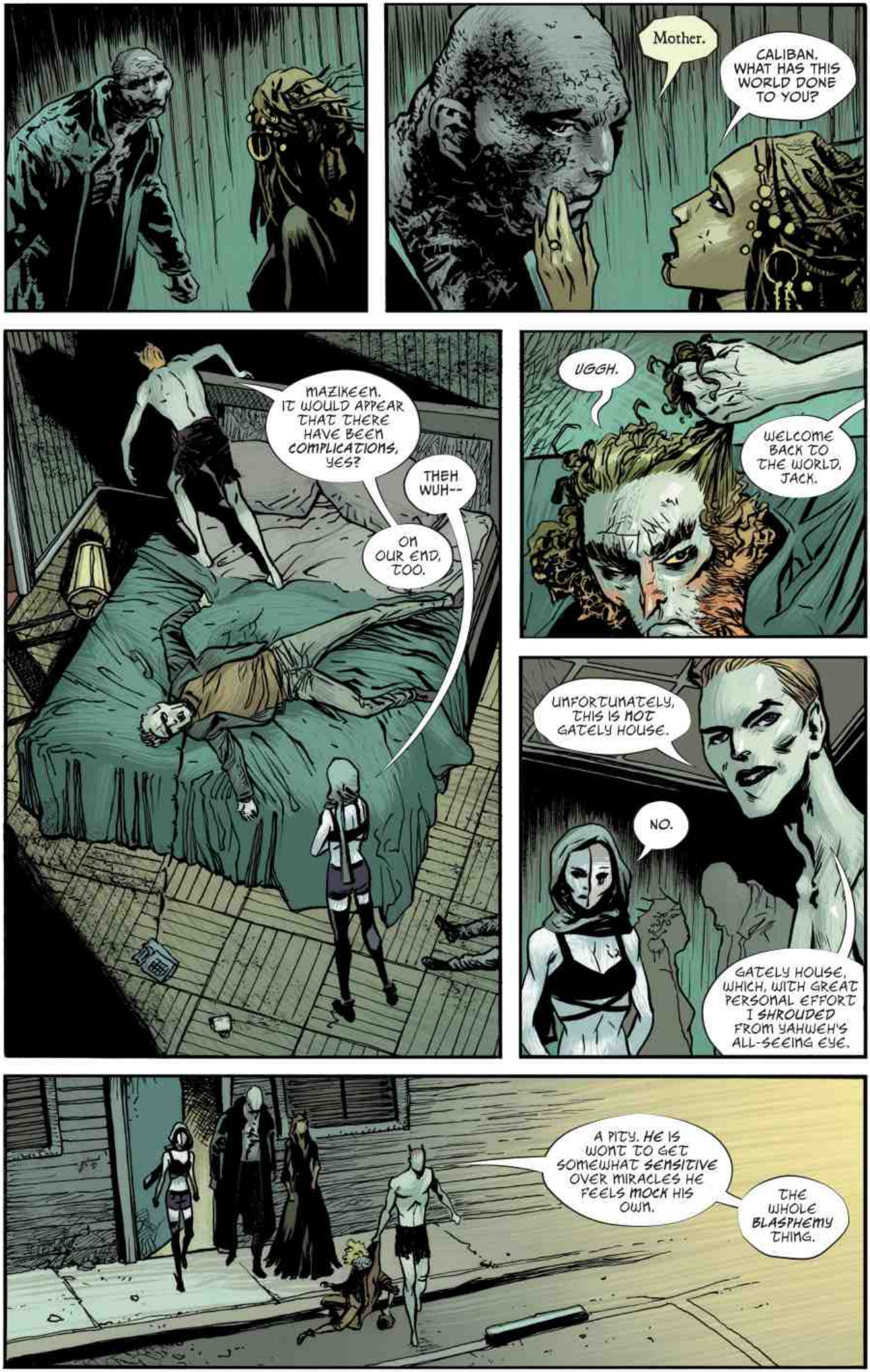

"AND THERE I GAVE BIRTH TO A MEWLING, SQUAWKING THING. ALONE."
"ALL THIS I TOLD HIM..."

BUT FOR YOUR MOTHER'S CHOICE YOU MAY HAVE BEEN RAISED IN HELL, HEIR TO ALL I'VE ABANDONED.
WHETHER SHE SAVED YOU THUS OR DAMNED YOU I SUPPOSE IS A DECISION YOU MUST MAKE.
She would not have done so...it makes no sense.
SYCORAX IS THE ONLY BEAST I'VE KNOWN WHOSE WILL--AND THUS, HER PRIDE--DOES EQUAL MINE.
AND PRIDE AND SENSE RARELY MEET, I'VE HEARD SAID.
DO YOU HATE US BOTH NOW, FOR THE LIFE YOU NEVER HAD? FOR BRINGING YOU, UNASKED, INTO THE CRUEL AND ABSURD WORLD THAT YOU'VE KNOWN?
LIKE BACH'S ENDLESSLY RISING CANON, WE FIND OURSELVES AT THE START AGAIN.
ANOTHER REBELLION STIRS IN A SON'S HEART.


I don't ascribe to fate more than to hope.
Perhaps if I forgive, I'll rise above the cycle that you claim is Yahweh's plan.
Perhaps I'll do *that* which you never could.
PERHAPS. PERHAPS. IT IS A TRICKY THING.
COME MEET YOUR MOTHER'S KEEPERS DOWN THE YEARS. THEY'RE WAITING IN A PLACE CALLED GATELY HOUSE.

HE HAS SUFFERED.
HE FEELS THAT YOU ABANDONED HIM.
DOES A WOMAN NOT HAVE THE RIGHT TO LIVE NOT SUBJECT TO ANOTHER? DOES SHE NOT HAVE THE RIGHT TO DIE?
I WILL SPEAK WITH HIM.
I DID THINK SO.
DAMN YOU, LUCIFER.
THE MAN'S HAND FEELS HEAVY AND HE LETS IT FALL FOR THE LAST TIME. HE CAN'T SEE OR HEAR VERY WELL ANYMORE...

...IT IS WITH RELIEF THAT HE LETS HIS MUSCLES SLACKEN, AND FALLS.
BEFORE HIM, THE ROOM FILLS WITH LIGHT AND MEAT.
THERE IS THE SOUND OF GRISTLE GROWING, OF BONES SNAPPING AND POPPING AS TWO BROKEN BODIES RESTORE THEMSELVES TO THEIR FORMER STATES.
BUT JOHN DECKER--FOR THAT IS HIS NAME, HE REMEMBERS NOW--SEES ONLY THE WOMAN STANDING BEFORE HIM.
SHE IS NOT PENELOPE--SHE IS NOT HIS WIFE--BUT HER BLACK-LIPPED SMILE IS KIND, AND SHE KNOWS WHERE PENELOPE IS.
SO JOHN DECKER TAKES HER HAND.
WHO IS THIS?
NO MATTER. HERE WE ALL ARE AT LAST.
LUH-LUHSHIFER, YUH URH RETURHNED!


Mother.
CALIBAN. WHAT HAS THIS WORLD DONE TO YOU?
MAZIKEEN. IT WOULD APPEAR THAT THERE HAVE BEEN COMPLICATIONS, YES?
THEH WUH--
OH OUR END, TOO.
UGGH.
WELCOME BACK TO THE WORLD, JACK.
UNFORTUNATELY, THIS IS NOT GATELY HOUSE.
NO.
GATELY HOUSE, WHICH, WITH GREAT PERSONAL EFFORT I SHROUDED FROM YAHWEH'S ALL-SEEING EYE.
A PITY. HE IS WONT TO GET SOMEWHAT SENSITIVE OVER MIRACLES HE FEELS MOCK HIS OWN.
THE WHOLE BLASPHEMY THING.

RESURRECTIONS DO TEND TO FALL UNDER THAT REMIT.
To Be Continued

Lucifer

"A LONG-AWAITED COMEUPPANCE"

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Curated for THE SANDMAN UNIVERSE by Neil Gaiman

NEXT ISSUE:
A SLIGHT DETOUR TO HELL

God is angry, Sycorax lives again, Lucifer goes to Hell, and Mazikeen gets to break a finger or two.

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SON OF ULTRON